Congressional Access Dispute

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Colby Sees Data Compromise

By George Lardner Jr.
Washington Post Staff Writer

The director of the Central Intelligence Agency yesterday said he felt the dispute over congressional access to government secrets could be settled by skirting the "ultimate question" of who should have the last word in making them public.

William E. Colby said he felt new procedures could be hammered out over the weekend that would satisfy the needs of the House intelligence committee for classified information and still give the administration ample opportunity to prevent damaging disclosures.

Committee Chairman Otis G. Pike (D-N.Y.) said after a meeting with President Ford Friday that they were still "a long way" from settling the impasse that Pike has threatened ot meet with contempt-of-Congress citations.

Colby said, however, said "the President's pretty sure we can work something out."

He spoke up in an interview in which he said he was anxious to make his views known.

Pike has said he still plans at a committee meeting Monday to press for a vote of confidence from the full House endorsing the committee's efforts to secure sentitive information and testimony from the executive branch without any conditions attached.

White House and committee aides were working over the weekend in an effort to draft an agreement that might settle the rift.

Colby indicated that various procedures were being studied as refinements of the committee's 24-hour rule for giving notice to the administration before voting to make any documents public.

Reportedly, the President might agree to review personally those records that the committee still wants to make public in the face of administration objections.

Colby declined to discuss the details of the proposed compromise under discussion, but he suggested that it would avoid "the ultimate question" of who should have the last word—the President or Congress—and would focus instead on various ways of releasing disputed information.

Mr. Ford, Colby said, has made it plain that there is to be no cover-up of any wrongoding or mistakes. The CIA director maintained that the only issue is how much detail and in what form such information is to be disclosed.

The dispute with the Pike committee began Sept. 11, when committee members voted to declassify portions of a top-secret study showing that U.S. intelligence agencies wee "starkly wrong" about the 1973 Arab-Israeli war. Several phrases were deleted at Colby's request, but the committee refused to suppress a four-word phrase about Egyptian communicatins security that Colby wanted to keep secret.

p Colby made plain yesterday that he felt he might ave been able to persuade the committee if it had been willing to wait for him to marshal his arguments. He said he felt the phrase "pinpointed our ability to learn certain things at certain times" and that other countries could use knowledge of this fact to their own advantage.
dispute.

Colby said, without offering any details, that he hs since satisfied himself there "is a good basis for the position I took," but that he was simply unable to convey it to the committee "in the course of a single afternoon on the telephone."

On Sept. 12, the President demanded the return of all classified documents in the House committee's hands—an ultimatum that has so far been ignored. Mr. Ford lso avowed to produce no m clssified information or testimony to committee unless it stopped asserting the right to make it public.

Pike indicated Friday that the two sides may be close to agreement on a controversial State Department edict that would keep all but top policymakers in the department from estifying fully before the committee. Colby declined to comment on that dispute.